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We Shut Elbit Down!

**Reflections from the Cambridge, Massachusetts
Campaign Against Elbit Systems**

CrimethInc., Anonymous

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We Shut Elbit Down!

Reflections from the Cambridge, Massachusetts Campaign
Against Elbit Systems

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- **August 7, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
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- **August 21, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **August 26, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **September 2, 2024:** BDS Boston calls for a march and rally outside of the Elbit office to celebrate the early termination of the lease.

- **June 5, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **June 12, 2024:** Activists occupy the lobby of Boeing. Barricading themselves inside, they prevent a gathering crowd of employees and police from entering. After an hour, the activists leave together, without arrests.
- **June 12, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **June 26, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **June 29, 2024:** 100 activists march to Peter Palandjian's house for a noise demonstration. Palandjian is the CEO of Intercontinental Real Estate, the landlord leasing office space in Cambridge to Elbit.
- **July 3, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **July 12, 2024:** Start of the BDS Boston and Palestinian Youth Movement week of action. Over 100 people join the welcome dinner and Palestine 101 workshop.
- **July 13, 2024:** BDS Boston shuts down the Chase Bank branch in Harvard Square from open to close. Activists blocked the entrances with lockboxes and human chains.
- **July 15, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit for 18 hours. Teach-ins happen throughout the day. By night, the picket converts into a vigil for martyrs, and then a movie screening. Activists hold the intersection outside the office for the entire time.
- **Late July 2024:** Activists hold a noise demo outside Peter Palandjian's home at 2 am.
- **July 24, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **July 31, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.

Elbit Systems is Israel's largest weapons manufacturer. On September 8, 2021, Elbit announced it would open an "Innovation Center" in Cambridge, Massachusetts for its subsidiary company KMC Systems. The Innovation Center lasted less than three years before activists forced it to close.

Last year's early-lease termination of the KMC office is the first time that activists in the United States have forced Elbit Systems to close a facility. It is also one of the few successes that the US Palestine solidarity movement has achieved since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza in 2023. This anonymously submitted analysis explores the year-long targeted direct action campaign that successfully evicted KMC Systems from Cambridge.

Getting Started

On September 8, 2021, Israel's largest weapons company announced that its subsidiary KMC Systems was opening an "Innovation Center" in the heart of downtown Cambridge. KMC Systems (henceforth referred to as its parent company, Elbit) explained the new facility as part of the company's anticipated growth. Starting their expansion in Cambridge put the company within walking distance of its "top talent" recruitment pools of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). While the city's mayor gleefully cut Elbit's red ribbon, activists took note. But they didn't strike immediately.

In nearby Somerville, many Palestine solidarity organizers had their hands full pressuring Puma to end its contract with the Israel Football Association. Others were quietly preparing to publish an interactive research project tracking Zionist collaboration across Massachusetts, known as The Mapping Project. Over a year passed before a protest was organized against Elbit, following the deadly raid that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) perpetrated against the Jenin refugee camp in January 2023.

Days later, a crowd of 300 people gathered at Cambridge City Hall and marched two blocks to disrupt the Innovation Center at 130 Bishop-Allen Drive. As the three-story building was surrounded by a sea of Palestinian flags, several dozen activists stormed the downstairs lobby. Keycard access-only elevators prevented activists from reaching the second floor where Elbit rented space. Instead, organizers gave speeches against the weapons company, disrupted work for the first-floor tenant, and left before police could carry out arrests. The march continued unimpeded to the nearby MIT campus.

Months later, in April 2023, organizers called the first rally specifically singling out Elbit. A few dozen activists met up, marched through the street to the office, and yelled outside. A few weeks later, a May 15 Nakba Day rally-turned-march stopped at the Elbit facility. This time, someone spray-painted “Land Back” across the building before slipping back into the march.

Sensing what might be coming, Elbit attempted to obscure its presence. After the two consecutive protests, it removed the KMC Systems logo from view and tinted the office windows. Too late.

That spring, an activist group called BDS Boston declared a campaign to evict Elbit from Cambridge. They started by canvassing the businesses around Central Square where Elbit was located. By their third canvass, every business in the vicinity had been reached. Many were sympathetic; a few offered to display informational leaflets condemning their neighbor. Two blocks from the office, a popular Palestinian coffeehouse prominently displayed the flier at the register. One can only hope it spoiled the lunch break of at least one Elbit employee.

From April to October 2023, BDS Boston regularly canvassed the surrounding block. Often a few people, sometimes as many as twenty, would gather outside Elbit during the weekday and hand leaflets to passersby with information about the weapons company in their backyard. This early activity wasn’t confrontational, but it

- **March 9, 2024:** More than 100 people shut down a Chase Bank branch at the Prudential Center mall in Boston. Activists disrupt the branch by throwing bloodied money, dumping rubble and bloodied linens at the entrances, preventing people from entering, and picketing outside.
- **March 19, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **March 22, 2024:** Seven people block the entrance of the Elbit manufacturing facility in Merrimack, New Hampshire using lock boxes.
- **March 26, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit. Elbit releases its 2023 financial results to shareholders.
- **March 30, 2024:** Activists block traffic for Palestinian Land Day on the Longfellow Bridge using chains and bike locks.
- **April 6, 2024:** Palestinian Youth Movement and BDS Boston hold a joint demonstration against Elbit.
- **April 15, 2024:** Activists simultaneously disrupt four Chase Bank branches across Boston by throwing bloodied money and chanting anti-Elbit slogans.
- **April 17, 2024:** Columbia University students camp out on the lawn for Gaza, sparking a national wave of student encampments. Within a week, Boston campuses recreate the action with camps springing up at Emerson, Northeastern, MIT, Harvard, Boston University, and Tufts.
- **May 15, 2024:** Palestine solidarity activists protest around the city for Nakba day. Anti-Elbit graffiti appears around Boston. JP Morgan Chase SEC filings show a 70% reduction in Elbit shares.
- **May 29, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit. Activists drop a banner reading ELBIT KILLS from the Charles Bridge.

- **January 20, 2024:** More than 100 people shut down a Chase Bank branch in Harvard Square. Activists disrupt the branch by throwing bloodied money, preventing people from entering, and picketing outside.
- **February 8, 2024:** Activists disrupt BNY Mellon, an investor in Elbit Systems, at their Boston office, throwing bloodied-money and chanting anti-Elbit slogans.
- **February 11, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **February 17, 2024:** More than 100 people shut down a Chase Bank branch in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. Activists disrupt the branch by throwing bloodied money, dumping rubble and bloodied linens at the entrances, preventing people from entering, and picketing outside. After the branch closes early, activists take over the adjoining intersection to give speeches in support of the Palestinian armed resistance.
- **February 21, 2024:** Activists learn that Elbit employees can work remotely on days there is a protest. BDS Boston schedules a picket outside Elbit at 9 am.
- **February 27, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **February 29, 2024:** Activists block the entrance of the Elbit facility in Birdsboro, Pennsylvania. Six are arrested.
- **March 4, 2024:** More than 50 people block trucks at a Boston shipping zone for an hour to protest the blocking of aid trucks in Gaza.
- **March 7, 2024:** BDS Boston protests outside of MassMEDIC, a medical device manufacturing summit, over Elbit's participation. Activists demand KMC Systems clients end their contracts.

established a visual presence and routine of frequency that would be important in the months to come.

Early canvassing efforts were also supported by the Filipino group Malaya Movement. In August, the group filed a policy order in the Cambridge City Council to support the Philippine Human Rights Act. In it was a clause condemning Elbit's war crimes in the Philippines. The Cambridge City Council voted to remove all mention of Elbit.

By early fall, messages such as "War criminals work at 130 Bishop-Allen Drive" and "Elbit out of Cambridge now!" were graffitied on sidewalks throughout the wealthy neighborhoods near the office, generating minor chatter on local Reddit threads.

October 7, 2023

On October 7, 2023, the siege on Gaza was momentarily broken when 3000 militants led by the al-Qasam brigades overpowered the Zionist occupation by sea, in the air, and above and below the ground. The world was shocked; many anticipated the escalation in violence from the Israeli military that followed immediately after. An urgent momentum pulsed through the international Palestine movement. Demonstrations erupted everywhere. In Boston, hundreds of people took the streets in support of the resistance. One of the first major rallies in Boston focused on Elbit.

Within a week, a new group modeled on the British direct action network Palestine Action (and briefly operating under the same name) prevented Elbit workers from accessing their Cambridge office. Before opening hours, three Palestine Action US activists barricaded the door to the building by bike-locking their necks to the door handles. One also dumped red paint across the sidewalk and spray-painted "Shut Elbit Down" on the building. Having successfully deterred the employees, the activists were

able to unlock themselves and slip home right under the noses of the bewildered Cambridge police.

Within a few hours, anonymous activists vandalized the building again. The walls were spray-painted with anti-Elbit slogans and the keycard machine was smashed. Four days later, anonymous activists hit the building once more, smashing keycard readers and dousing the building in red paint that took weeks to remove.

Intercontinental Real Estate, the real estate company that owns the Bishop-Allen building and leased the second floor to Elbit, was targeted a week later. Anonymous activists sprayed red paint across their office and smashed the keycard readers. A local news station was also covered in red paint.

During this time, BDS Boston transitioned from canvassing the sidewalk to picketing the office and announcing noise demonstrations. The small-to-medium crowds these regularly drew now brought megaphones and banners.

On October 30, Palestine Action called a rally outside of the Elbit office. More than 200 people arrived. Police set up a perimeter of metal barricades around the building and staged officers behind them. The crowd chanted against the police for protecting a weapons company. Several people began pushing through the barricades toward the building. Unprepared, the police panicked. They snatched people from the crowd, tackling them and pepper-spraying wildly. One cop lost his footing on wet leaves and cartoonishly crashed into the sidewalk. Officers openly argued with each other about what to do. Activists de-arrested each other and pushed back against the police; some enthusiastically hurled eggs and smoke pellets at them.

Altogether, nine people were arrested on charges ranging from disorderly conduct to assault on an officer. All were released that same evening, and eventually, a judge dismissed all of their charges.

- **November 17, 2023:** Tufts University students blockade the administrator building for several hours demanding divestment from Israel. A few savvy students in the blockade use the school's personnel website to learn the names of the campus police responding to the action and begin chants addressing each police officer by name.
- **November 26, 2023:** Activists disrupt a baggage claim area at Boston Logan airport in protest of Boeing. One activist is arrested. Several dozen more continue to rally outside the airport for a few hours.
- **December 2, 2023:** BDS Boston picket outside Elbit.
- **December 13, 2023:** Puma announces it will no longer sponsor the Israel Football Association (IFA).
- **December 14, 2023:** Cambridge Police are photographed staging snipers on the roof across the street from Elbit in anticipation of a protest.
- **December 16, 2023:** Activists gather for a "family-friendly" protest at Cambridge City Hall. Free food is served, several speeches take place, and attendees dance *dabket* together on the City Hall lawn. Activists spray-paint yard signs reading "ELBIT OUT OF CAMBRIDGE" and chalk the steps of City Hall with anti-Elbit slogans.
- **December 18, 2023:** More than 50 activists block trucks in the rain at a shipping terminal in Boston to protest the blocking of aid trucks at the Rafah crossing.
- **January 1, 2024:** BDS Boston pickets outside Elbit.
- **January 17, 2024:** Activists block the entrance to a Raytheon manufacturing facility in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. Red paint appears on the Raytheon sign.

- **October 12, 2023:** Three Palestine Action activists bike-lock their necks to the entrance of the Elbit office, blocking employees from entering. Someone pours red paint all over the sidewalk. “Shut Elbit Down” is spray-painted on the building. That night, the building is vandalized again, spray-painted with “Elbit Makes Genocide,” “Fuck Elbit,” and “Elbit Get Out.” The key-card machine is smashed.
- **October 16, 2023:** During the night, anonymous activists douse the Elbit building in red paint and graffiti it with “Elbit Arms Genocide.” The keycard reader is also smashed. This is the third consecutive vandalism against the Elbit office in four days.
- **October 18, 2023:** Elbit removes the Cambridge office from its website.
- **October 24, 2023:** Sometime in the night anonymous activists target the office of Elbit’s Cambridge landlord. The Intercontinental Real Estate office is sprayed with red paint; its keycard readers are smashed.
- **October 30, 2023:** 200 activists rally outside the Elbit office. Many push through police barricades; several hurl eggs and smoke pellets at Cambridge Police. Nine are arrested, though a judge eventually dismisses all charges.
- **Early November, 2023:** Activists disrupt a career fair at Wentworth University sponsored by Elbit Systems, at which KMC Systems also had a recruiting table.
- **November 2, 2023:** BDS Boston pickets outside of Elbit.
- **November 5, 2023:** Multiple blocks of Cambridge’s Central Square are chalked with the names of Palestinian martyrs.

Intercontinental Real Estate, You Can’t Hide!

After the October 30 rally, Palestine Action dialed back on the Cambridge Elbit facility. The group called for a protest there on December 14, which was later quietly rescinded. Online, they promoted actions against Elbit Systems of America nationally, pushing people to get organized against the war machine, form affinity groups, and take direct action. In November, the group organized its last public action before disbanding. On November 20, activists descended on the Elbit manufacturing facility in Merrimack, New Hampshire. They bike-locked entrances, smashed glass doors, covered the building in paint, broke the HVAC system, and graffitied “Free Gaza, Fuck Elbit!” Four people were arrested; they ultimately served 40 days in jail and two years on probation.

Around Boston, various NGOs and the Democratic Socialists of America made futile appeals to Elizabeth Warren and other members of Congress to endorse a ceasefire. Local chapters of Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now briefly mimicked the performative arrest actions of Jewish activists that made headlines in DC and New York City. The Party for Socialism and Liberation wore people out marching outside empty consulate buildings and rallying over the weekends in public parks. Occasionally, unaffiliated activists staged disruptive actions against Boeing, Raytheon, and Boston trucking logistics.

Meanwhile, BDS Boston was brainstorming new ways to exert leverage against Elbit. By the end of October, the group launched a tertiary target campaign against the landlord, Intercontinental Real Estate. On social media, BDS Boston published the names, emails, and phone numbers of the three other companies renting space at 130 Bishop-Allen Drive. For the next ten months, the downstairs work-bar and the upstairs architecture firms received emails and phone calls about their neighbor on the second floor.

BDS activists were straining the relationships inside the building at the same time they were calling the real estate company

themselves. When the landlord's receptionist started hanging up calls, activists tried a new way to get through to the company. A local tenants union sent organizers into another of Intercontinental's properties, a luxury apartment complex downtown. Activists canvassed the irritated residents about their landlord, Intercontinental Real Estate CEO "Peter 'Genocide Profiteer' Palandjian." Complaints certainly got back to the company. By the time the tenants union organized a second canvass, private security was there waiting for them.

Does Your Bank Make a KILLING Off Genocide?

On January 22, BDS Boston expanded its actions against Elbit to include investor JP Morgan Chase. That day, nearly 200 people marched to the Harvard Square Chase Bank branch. Acting on their own, a few individuals went ahead of the march and disrupted the branch office, yelling anti-Elbit chants and throwing bloodied prop money everywhere. Outside, activists picketed in a long, unbroken circle taking up the whole block. The branch closed for the day.

Less than a month later, hundreds of activists shut down a Chase Bank branch in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. A handful of people recreated the bloodied-money disruption; others brought rubble and bloodied linens to dump outside the entrance, creating a visual of the company's investment in Elbit's genocide. The large crowd blocked entry to the bank until it closed for the day, then shut down traffic in the adjoining intersection, where speakers from Palestinian Youth Movement praised direct actions interrupting the US-Zionist war machine. Others spoke in support of Palestinian armed resistance.

Similar actions recurred a few more times. BDS Boston would announce a branch location, usually drawing over 100 people. As the crowd picketed the location and physically prevented people

and gain confidence when organizers felt the Elbit site was "too hot."

Following the success of this campaign, police have been expanding their toolkit. By summer 2024, three flock AI license plate reading cameras were installed on the Bishop-Allen building, and another at the entrance of the Intercontinental Real Estate office. For now, these are some of the only Flock cameras in the state of Massachusetts. Police are also requesting new surveillance camera installations around Cambridge, starting with Central Square.

Conclusion

This is not a recipe for shutting down Elbit offices. Each campaign confronts a unique convergence of forces. In sharing this story, we hope to share how some organizers assessed their specific situation and uplifted each other's tactics to win.

In addition to a strong analysis, Boston activists were consistent. Whether it was an individual or small group acting by night, a few dozen activists picketing Elbit during business hours, or hundreds shutting down Chase Bank on the weekend, there was activity against Elbit nearly every week for one year.

If you are reading this east of the Mississippi, you are within hours of an Elbit facility. With dedication, you can change that.

Appendix: Timeline of Actions

- **August 3, 2023:** BDS Boston and Malaya Movement canvass outside Elbit.
- **August 21, 2023:** BDS Boston canvasses outside of Elbit.
- **September 7, 2023:** BDS Boston canvasses outside of Elbit.

The Action - Repression Dialectic

The state inevitably responds to effective action. Smart campaigns seek to minimize, leverage, or crush the countermeasures that the authorities take against them without capitulating to intimidation. Activists must stay abreast of the shifting terrain of repression in order to minimize the damage it can do.

Following the slew of vandalism against the Elbit facility, building security increased to a round-the-clock stakeout by Cambridge Police and private security personnel. Usually, there was never more than one guard, numbing himself with cellphone blue-light and drive-thru fast food to bear the boring night shifts. This minor adjustment was evidently enough to deter vandalism. Who knows what the vandals' strategic calculations were; still, it's worth stating that activists don't always have to be on the back foot with police.

That much was evident at the October 30 rally, when the rowdiness of the crowd caught police off guard. How much more could have been achieved with a bit more coordination? By December, police were showing up more prepared.

Palestine Action intended to hold another rally outside the facility on December 14, but quietly canceled it. The only ones who showed up were the police. That morning, photos went viral showing Cambridge Police staging two snipers on the roof of a business directly across from Elbit. Activists were right to use the resulting scandal to their advantage. While some anti-police advocates turned out to City Hall decrying the disproportionate show of force, anti-Elbit organizers played up the tension with Elbit's co-tenants: *Why is an architect coming to work under the scope of a sniper?*

The three strategic pivots in response to the increased police presence at the facility between October and December were an outright end to vandalism, the scandal about the snipers, and a shift to tertiary targets. The latter move opened new spaces to gather

from accessing the branch, others acted autonomously as they saw fit, usually by throwing prop-money inside the branch or dumping rubble, paint, and bloodied linens at the doorway. Each action succeeded in closing the branch for the day. Only once was someone arrested for allegedly dumping rubble, and that person's charge was eventually dismissed.

Student Encampments

On April 17, 2024, Columbia students took over the lawn in a Student Encampment for Gaza. Police raided them the following day. When Columbia students' tents sprang back up, they were not alone. Within a week, similar protests erupted across the country. In Boston, students set up camps at Harvard, MIT, Emerson, Boston University, and Northeastern.

Days before this "student intifada," BDS Boston simultaneously disrupted four Chase Bank branches across the city. This was the last of the bank protests until mid-summer, and the penultimate such protest of the whole campaign. Most Palestine organizers were directing their energy to sustaining the camps throughout the city.

Disruptions targeting Elbit didn't pick back up again until the end of May. Riding the energy of the student encampments and the Chase Bank disruptions, picketers began coming out in larger numbers and with greater appetite to take the intersection outside of the Elbit office. At least 50 people repeatedly showed up and blocked cars from turning onto Bishop-Allen Drive, usually resulting in petty pushing matches with otherwise impotent Cambridge police. The protesters always stood their ground.

The Final Push

In February, BDS Boston organizers had learned that Elbit employees didn't have to come to the office on days when there was a protest. Pickets resumed regularly. By early May, the Chase Bank actions had decreased in frequency. JP Morgan Chase SEC filings showed a 70% reduction in Elbit shares, dropping their holdings from \$56 Million to \$16 Million. Activists kept phone-blitzing the other businesses in Elbit's building throughout spring and summer. Furious secretaries occasionally relayed the message that the landlord was trying to break the lease with Elbit as soon as possible. Organizers took this as encouragement, but treated it as nothing more than a rumor. If true, it was time to double down against the landlord.

In late June, more than 100 people gathered in Harvard Square to do just that. The crowd marched a mile north to the \$15 million home of Intercontinental Real Estate CEO Peter Palandjian. Rallying outside the yellow mansion, activists blasted Palandjian for cashing "blood money rent checks" and demanded that he immediately evict Elbit. Annoyed neighbors decried the noisy midday disruption. Activists plastered his street with pictures of his face, captioned: "WANTED FOR CASHING IN ON GENOCIDE. TELL YOUR NEIGHBOR TO EVICT THEIR GENOCIDAL TENANT."

In July, BDS Boston and Palestinian Youth Movement called for a week of action. The goal was to increase Boston community engagement with the Elbit campaign, planning something every day of the week. PYM led a Palestine 101 workshop over a kick-off dinner, presenting to over 100 people. The next morning, a crowd shut down the Harvard Square Chase Bank branch from the moment it opened until closing time. Later, PYM hosted a Tatreez workshop, followed by a No Tech for Apartheid teach-in.

The following evening, BDS Boston and PYM held an 18-hour picket outside the Elbit office. By day, activists picketed Elbit and chanted in support of the resistance. A People's University for

Organization, Dedication, Consistency

Groups that can analyze targets, experiment with tactics, and integrate strategic lessons are indispensable to winning campaigns. Palestine Action US disbanded after two actions. By November 2023, the anonymous vandalism at Elbit had ended. Palestinian Youth Movement got involved in 2024, after the campaign outlasted other local initiatives. Were it not for BDS Boston's unwavering focus and repeated actions against Elbit over the course of a year, the "Innovation Center" might never have closed.

It was easy to get distracted after October 7, 2023. The Toufan al-Aqsa operation and Israel's resulting scorched-earth policy generated unforeseen public support for Palestine. Masses of people flooded the streets looking to take action. Many groups called protests all over the city—protests with shifting targets and little strategy. BDS Boston was a joinable organization with an active campaign against a sensible target; this offered a meaningful way to get involved.

The politics of BDS Boston also played an important role. BDS Boston is not an NGO, but an independent political group; it does not focus on appealing to politicians, but on direct action. The group supports Palestinian resistance and is staunchly anti-Zionist. Around Boston, it distinguished itself by supporting The Mapping Project, an online resource tracking Zionist collaboration in Massachusetts; BDS Boston weathered a public feud with the BDS National Committee in Ramallah, which denounced that project.

These political distinctions aren't trivial. They are important guardrails against cooptation. It's no coincidence that BDS Boston helped make space for a campaign that broke away from NGO protest norms.

Tertiary Targeting, Straining the Weakest Link

By October, BDS Boston started a tertiary target campaign against the Cambridge “Innovation Center.” Over the next ten months, the group would experiment with three different types of tertiary targets: the landlord, Elbit Systems investors, and clients of KMC Systems.

Going after KMC Systems’ clients was the least-explored of the tertiary target campaigns. BDS Boston only organized two phone blitzes demanding that clients cut ties with the Elbit subsidiary. Once, the group called for a rally outside a research and development summit where KMC and its clients were present.

BDS Boston spent more time protesting Elbit investor JP Morgan Chase. The group organized several successful disruptions at a handful of consumer branches across greater Boston. The direct impact of these protests on Elbit was likely negligible, but they substantially benefitted BDS Boston itself. The group swelled in numbers during the bank protests, drawing more than 100 people each time. Protests at Chase Bank were always on weekends, providing the opportunity to be involved for those who couldn’t make the Elbit office pickets during the work week. Repeated success in closing branches with minimal effort built momentum and confidence that showed up later at pickets.

The most effective tertiary target was the landlord, Intercontinental Real Estate. This was both the weakest link in the chain and the most consequential. It was easy for protesters to make Elbit a business liability for Intercontinental on several fronts.

The fact that Elbit shared the building with several other businesses represented a vulnerability. Disruptions outside the building (vandalism, noisy picketing, clashes with police) irritated the other tenants. Wearing down the other tenants, canvassing other Intercontinental properties, and showing up at Palanjian’s home at all hours made it easier to let the lease lapse.

Palestine teach-in was set up right in the middle of the street. By night, the demonstration became a vigil and memorial for Palestinian martyrs. Only once did an agitator try to disrupt it: one night, a lone man with a sound cart interrupted the vigil with an Arabic-language recording of Zionist propaganda. Activists collectively shouted him down, surrounding him with kuffiyehs and eventually outlasting him.

Later, the space was converted again. Activists set out tarps and pillows and got comfortable in the street. They projected *Tell Your Tale Little Bird*, a documentary about Palestinian women resistance fighters, against the concrete wall of the building. For the whole night, the intersection belonged to the protest.

On another night, a few dozen activists returned to the landlord’s house in North Cambridge. Near 2 am, they gathered outside his front yard, banging noisemakers and shouting demands to evict Elbit. As private security chased and attempted to film the protesters, an irate Palandjian stumbled onto the porch, yelling in his underwear.

Elbit Out of Cambridge

By the end of the summer, the campaign had gained traction. Direct action against Elbit was a cornerstone of Palestine organizing in Boston. BDS Boston staged weekly pickets outside the office, taking more space and becoming increasingly comfortable pushing back police. Peter Palandjian was growing irritated. The upstairs tenants passed on rumors that most Elbit employees had started to work from home. The office was nearly always vacant.

On August 18, the Cambridge Day local news reported the office was empty. Elbit confirmed this publicly: they were gone. A few days later, activists held a march to celebrate. They took over the intersection below the now-empty office on the second floor, where flecks of red paint were still visible under the drawn win-

dow shades. Someone adjusted the usual chant “Elbit is not welcome here” to “Elbit is no longer here!” The crowd cheered. Hot-headed police repeatedly threatened to arrest activists, brandishing zip-ties, but the activists were undeterred.

Someone got on the megaphone. “You will not hear the word ‘victory’ from BDS Boston’s lips until Elbit Systems is completely dismantled. Until Palestine is completely liberated. Instead, you’ll hear us say: onward.”

Lessons and Reflections

The year-long campaign to evict Elbit Systems was animated by four groupings: the independent activist group BDS Boston, the direct action network Palestine Action, the Palestinian community group Palestinian Youth Movement, and anonymously acting individuals and affinity groups. Together, this constellation cut a new path for Palestine solidarity in Boston and for protest in the city in general.

This campaign was unique in the Boston Palestine ecosystem. Instead of pandering to city or federal politicians, it focused on impeding a specific unit of the Zionist war economy. The campaign also differed from one-off actions at Boeing and Raytheon sites. Disruptions against Elbit were routine, occurring almost weekly for the better part of year. Leasing office space in a shared building was a particular vulnerability activists were correct in exploiting.

The campaign was most led by independent, autonomous groups with strong political lines supporting each other’s tactics. The Elbit campaign rejected symbolic arrests and peace-policing. When people gathered in a crowd—whether of 20 or 200—it was to impede work, not march symbolically. Those who used megaphones praised those who used spray paint cans. This is a meaningful departure from the timid NGO-locomotive that typically drives Boston protests.

And it worked.

What Worked?

Here follow some individual reflections on the campaign.

Early, Repeated Vandalism

After October 7, the first actions at the Elbit office were vandalism. The building was graffitied and doused in paint three times in four days. Its keycard reader was smashed, as was the keycard reader at the Intercontinental Real Estate office. A local news station was doused in red paint. These actions occurred frequently—and the police had no leads, with the exception of one person who took public credit for one vandalism (their charges were later dropped by a judge). All of the anonymous vandalism was openly celebrated by the public-facing organs of the Elbit campaign.

The October 30 rally immediately followed this slew of paint actions. Predicting more vandalism, the police cordoned off the building with metal fencing and surrounded it. Protesters didn’t accept this turn of events, pushing through the police line and hurling eggs and smoke pellets at police. This was a major departure from the docile rallies Cambridge police had come to expect—and it showed in their aggravated and dysfunctional response.

Together, the weeks of vandalism followed by the confrontational demonstration signaled a willingness to escalate against Elbit. This specter lurked behind all future protests. It likely contributed to the work-from-home option Elbit eventually gave employees in response to protests. This was a useful leverage point for activists, turning less-confrontational protests into deterrents to come to work. Frequent protests meant fewer employees coming into work, which rendered the physical office a redundant business cost.